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ABSTRACT

Major conceptual differences exist between critical communication scholars and marketing researchers in their approaches to the study of international advertising. In marketing research, the conceptual framework is characteristically built around the multinational corporation, while critical communication scholarship stresses the nation-state. The two approaches also differ in their conceptualization of the relationship among nations (dependency versus interdependency), the consumer (creation of needs versus fulfillment of preexisting needs), development and advertising, and the relationship between advertising and media systems. A careful analysis of these two approaches can help in constructing a more realistic agenda for research on international advertising. (FL)

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TOWARD A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA FOR INTERNATIONAL ADVERTISING

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to compare two divergent conceptual approaches to international advertising. The first is drawn from the marketing and advertising literature and the second comes from the field of mass communication research.

The impetus for such a comparison lies in a recognition that the subject of international advertising falls largely within the overlapping disciplinary boundaries of marketing research and communication research. The major portion of all published research on international advertising comes from one of these two fields. Furthermore, scholars in both fields acknowledge the need for further conceptual work and empirical research(6,7). Despite such a common concern with international advertising, marketing and communication researchers have, for the most part, gone their separate ways.

The lack of interdisciplinary exchange is hardly surprising given the ideological gulf separating critical scholars in mass communication from most marketing researchers. This paper is certainly not intended to reconcile or bridge that gap. Instead, its basic assumption is that a comparison of the two dominant theoretical approaches to international advertising should lead toward a more realistic agenda for future research in the field.

Areas of agreement as well as disagreement may suggest important topics for inquiry. However, the comparison in this paper is a preliminary effort and does not attempt to deal with all of the major conceptual differences between the two approaches.

Theoretical Versus Applied Emphasis

At the outset, one general difference between marketing research and communication research should be noted. Most marketing and advertising research is applied rather than theoretical and relates to such areas as media planning, development of creative strategies, market segmentation, or testing of campaign effectiveness. Proportionately more communication scholarship is based, at least ostensibly, on theory, and aims at a broader understanding of international advertising. However, this difference in emphasis between the two fields should not obscure the important role of theory in marketing. Scholars in that discipline also build theoretical models to better explain or predict international advertising and related phenomena. Those theoretical and conceptual frameworks most relevant to international advertising are the focus for comparison in this paper.

Units of Analysis: The Company (MNC) Versus the Nation

Characteristically, conceptual analysis of international advertising by marketing scholars begins with the multinational corporation and focuses on questions of management, organization and control necessary to successfully market products on a global scale. Keegan (7) defines multinational marketing as ". . . the process of focusing the resources and objectives of an organization on global market opportunities (p. 3)." With such an approach, the corporation is at the center of the conceptual scheme, and clusters of nations, with varying market characteristics, are located around the periphery.

Critical communication scholars, by contrast, build their

conceptual framework starting with the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis. The nation and the concept of national sovereignty are central to such a conceptual approach (10).

Dependency theory, which has been particularly well-developed by Latin American communication scholars (13,14), sets forth some of the unequal relationships that exist among nations of the world. Ordinarily, dependency theory is conceived of within a broader theory of imperialism. That broad theory specifies a number of relationships between Center and Periphery nations of the world . The center nations comprise a loosely-constituted core of industrial and post-industrial market economies, with all other nations of the world on the periphery.

The contrasting choice of conceptual units by marketing scholars and critical communication researchers reflects differences in ideology as well as in the purpose and scope of the theoretical formulations. A discussion of such differences is well beyond the scope of this paper, which is limited to a conceptual comparison.

Dependency versus Interdependency

Dependency theorists (13,14) have attempted to analyze a number of forms of dependence, including the economic, political, military, and communication-cultural spheres. During the past decade, the communication-cultural sphere of dependency has received much more attention in relation to the international debate over a "New World Information Order."

Two leading critical communication scholars, after noting

that the world business system today is centered on the American economy and that the unit of decision making is the transnational corporation (TNC) note the following: "Most of the TNCs are only indirectly related to the mass media, but still they have a decisive role in determining -- largely through advertising -- the content of media flows and, consequently, the social consciousness prevailing in society, propagating the system's values and reinforcing its authority as the ultimate definer of issues (10)." Advertising, in other words, is a central force in the creation of communication-cultural dependency.

In contrast, the concept of interdependency is a salient part of theoretical approaches to international advertising in the marketing literature. By definition, multinational marketing focuses resources and objectives of an organization on global market opportunities. One of the unique advantages of multinational marketing over other modes is the opportunity that it provides for a company to develop leverage, or advantages that come with operating simultaneously in more than one national market. However, the effective use of leverage requires a degree of international cooperation, such as that seen among the industrialized countries of the world since World War II. The same commitment to interdependence does not, of course, exist among the developing countries, who have comparatively little to gain from the arrangement(7).

The Consumer: Pre-existing Needs Versus Created Needs

Much of the marketing literature conceptualizes the consumer

as a person whose needs or wants are satisfied through consumption. Mazlow's need hierarchy, which suggests that man's desires can be rank-ordered in terms of potency, is commonly found in marketing textbooks. Despite some differences in the specific approach, most marketing scholars conceptualize international advertising as a process aimed largely at satisfying inbred psychological needs of consumers (7).

In the last decade, psychological theories of the role of communication in development have been criticized as part of the "old paradigm" in that field (5). With respect to international advertising, critical scholars suggest that it is a powerful persuasive force in the production of a consumer ideology (6). Rather than supplying information about products that fill pre-existing consumer needs, it persuades consumers that they need the advertised products. The argument is couched both in general terms, and in terms of specific products such as infant formula (18), soft drinks, or pharmaceutical products (9).

The question of whether international advertising meets or creates needs, and the question of a psychological versus a sociological interpretation of the phenomenon is underscored by a major change in modern marketing practices. According to Keegan (7) "The most basic contribution of marketing thought in the product decision area has been to shift the emphasis from the product itself to the needs and desires of the customer (p. 263)"

Advertising and Development

The concept of national development occupies a very different place in marketing than in communication research. For marketing

scholars, the level of economic development of countries is an important variable relating to the attractiveness of entering any given market. Keegan (7), for example, suggests a division of countries into pre-industrial, underdeveloped, semideveloped, industrialized, and post-industrial classifications, based on per capita income levels. Not surprisingly, when this is done, the 68 pre-industrial and underdeveloped countries are not very attractive markets for most consumer and industrial products. In Keegan's words , "The importance of developing countries to multinational manufacturing companies is largely a myth (p. 475)."

For most products, income is the single most valuable economic variable in assessing market characteristics. For this reason, developing nations are a marginal or long-range consideration in the conceptual approach of most marketing scholars.

Having chosen the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis, it follows that critical communication scholars place heavy stress on the concept of national development and the role of advertising in relation to it. For the most part, they suggest that advertising is a very important influence on the national development process. One approach (6) contrasts the influence of advertising with United Nations international development strategy and suggests that advertising constitutes a parallel and non-official development programme. Central to this argument is the notion that multinational advertising stimulates demand for many non-essential products.

Even though national development is a less central concept for marketing researchers than for communication scholars, the

marketing approach does address the question of the actual and potential contribution of marketing and advertising to development. The following passage from the fourth edition of a major international marketing text illustrates one view:

> Advertising's function is not to rob sales from competitors or to gull the unsophisticated, but to teach new need-satisfying consumption patterns in developing countries. Advertising has demonstrated its effectiveness as a teacher of new ways of living. It shows people how to use products and gives them confidence to try better foods, new ways of keeping clean, use of tools and a whole host of improved ways of living. Advertising also explains the use of money to purchase alternatives, to save for the future, and for future purchases. In effect, advertising helps to change expectations for the material future as well as aiding economic and social change (2,page 445)

The view expressed in the preceding passage is not universally shared by marketing scholars. Keegan (7), for example, takes explicit note of the criticism that marketing, because of its focus on the creation of new needs and wants, is inappropriate for use in less-developed nations (page 134). He agrees that such a focus is inappropriate, but contends that marketing science is ". . . fundamentally a system of concepts,tools, and skills that enables managers to match the capability of organizations to the needs of society (page 134)" His argument suggests that many developing nations could benefit from the use of social marketing (8).

Social marketing is a concept that was originally introduced into the marketing literature by Kotler and Zaltman (8). They defined it as ". . . the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communications, and marketing research." Since its introduction,

the concept has been widely debated in the marketing field. Its importance for the study of international advertising lies in the fact that many, if not most, attempts to apply social marketing in the field have been in the developing nations of the world. In a large number of countries, commercial advertising techniques and the broader social marketing concept have been used in programs to promote such causes as family planning, breast feeding, and infant nutrition(4).

Advertising and Media Systems

Another conceptual contrast between marketing and critical communication research concerns the control and support of mass media systems. Both approaches suggest, based on available empirical data, that advertising has been the primary source of funding for mass media around the world, with the exception of socialist bloc countries (2,19). However, they diverge on the implications of such advertiser-support. According to some marketing scholars, advertising funds give the media both economic health and freedom from central control. Critical communication scholars, on the other hand, suggest that ". . . the greater the financial contribution of the advertisers, the greater their influence over the form and contents of the media (6)." The full argument, which is beyond the scope of this paper, is based on the idea that the media exist primarily to create and broaden markets through the use of advertising. Transmission of news and other information then becomes a secondary function.

Summary

This paper introduced and briefly discussed some major conceptual differences between critical communication scholarship and marketing researchers in their approach to the study of international advertising. In marketing, the conceptual framework is characteristically built around the multinational corporation, while critical communication scholars stress the nation-state. The two approaches also differ in their conceptualization of the relationship among nations (dependency versus interdependency); the consumer (creation of needs versus fulfillment of pre-existing needs); development and advertising; and the relationship between advertising and media systems.

The comparisons made in this paper are preliminary and in some cases tentative in nature. They reflect an assumption that, if more thoroughly developed, such an analysis can help to construct a more realistic agenda for research on international advertising.

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